

# The **h2b** Safer Guide on 10 things you **NEED** to know about **kik**.

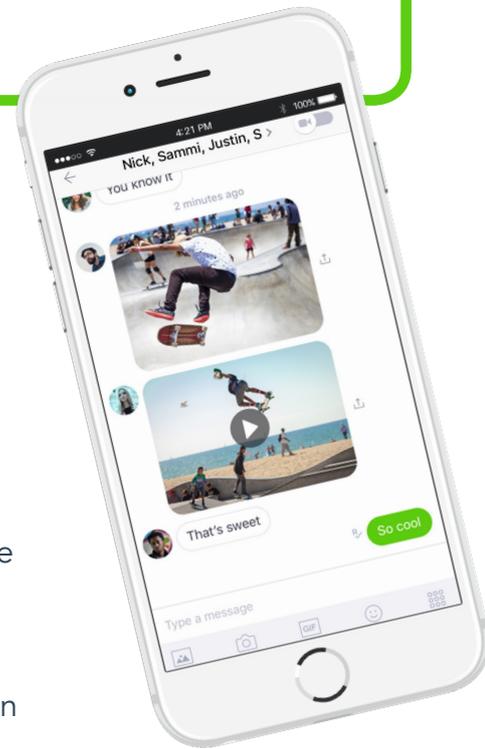
## Be careful how you get your Kiks!

Kik is a controversial messaging app popular with children and young people. When we carry out our routine reviews, product and online decoy testing we've found that it appears to be an app of choice for predators. **Why? Well read on...**

## What is Kik?

Kik is an instant messaging app where users send messages over the Internet via Wi-Fi or a data plan. It can be a fun, free alternative to texting.

Kik enables users to chat one-on-one with others, to create their own personal groups or to chat in public or private groups with up to 50 members: it's one of the things that makes Kik so appealing for young users.



## Age Ratings

Under their Terms of Service, Kik state that users must be **13+**.

On the **App store** Kik is given a user rating of **17+** (we think they've got this right!). **Google Play** doesn't give a specific age rating but suggests 'parental guidance' when using the app.

If a user is **under 13** and simply lies about their age to use the App they're opening themselves up to **inappropriate behaviour**, **risky relationships** and **advertising** aimed at older children.

## Privacy



There are **NO privacy** or **parental** controls, in fact anyone can **search for a username** and send them a **message**.

Did we mention there are **NO privacy controls**?! Just checking!

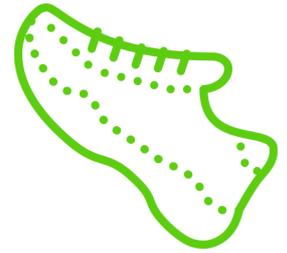
There **are** features that allow users to **block** and **report** others – so if you or a child you are responsible for use the app make sure you **learn how to use** these functions and **teach children** to do the same.

## #KikMe!

Many Kik users recklessly **share their username** across other online platforms such as **Instagram, Twitter, Facebook** and **Reddit**.

They use the hashtag **'#KikMe'** or **'#AddMeOnKik'** along with their username. This is to encourage those who see their post (i.e strangers) to **add them** and **chat to them** on the app.

If you really want more friends, talk to more people in the real world or your REAL friends online because the **#KikMe** approach can really hurt... ouch!



## Personal Information



Kik does not require much personal information in order to sign up, nor does it actively encourage you to share it on your profile.

You're probably thinking it's a bit like **WhatsApp** but unlike WhatsApp, Kik **doesn't** need a **mobile phone number**; users simply make up a **unique username** that is linked to their account. Any information on the profile will be seen by any other user e.g. the profile photo and any associated information.

As people tend to use the **same username** for different platforms a Kik username is often the same or similar to usernames related to other social media accounts. This makes it easy for people to **find users** and **track them** across different social media platforms – **NOT** a **good idea**.

There is **no way to log out** of Kik so once it is downloaded and signed in the only way to dissociate your account from your phone would be to **delete or uninstall the app** completely.

**PS:** If you load it back onto your device and log in, it will bring back all the stuff you probably deleted it to avoid...



## Google search for 'Kik usernames'

A simple Google search for **'Kik Usernames'** brings up lots of different sites where Kik users have posted their username. Lots of people do this to build their contact lists. #OhDear!



On certain sites you can even **search for users between certain ages**, e.g. 13-18: this must be one of the predator's favourite features.

### FUN FACT

**kik** has a reported **15 million** active users.

## Public Groups



Public groups on Kik mean that **anyone** can join. Kik pride themselves on having groups for almost every interest and hobby e.g. Harry Potter or Cooking, of course there are no guarantees that the chat inside the group actually reflect the title.

Whilst some groups are set up as '11-16 chat' –there is **no** meaningful **age verification**. This means that **anyone can join the group** and pretend to be within the age range. Are you still wondering why predators like it?

## Private Groups



Private groups can be **safer** than public groups; that is IF they are actually made up of a **group of 'real' friends**. You can have up to **50 members in a private group**. The only way to access a private group is via an invite link or by scanning the group code. Don't join a group if you don't know who is in it. Even when you do, always be careful; **people aren't always who or what they seem to be**.

## Inappropriate Content



There is **no moderation** within group chats therefore children and young people using the app can be exposed to vile language and inappropriate content e.g. graphic images or videos posted into the chat.

It is easy to unintentionally **stumble across inappropriate content** on Kik e.g. when testing we searched for cooking groups; groups with names such as 'Webcam Hot S e x' appeared in our search results.

## What should professionals, parents and carers do?

If you care for a child who uses **Kik** it is important to talk to them about how they use it.



Start by searching online for abuse related to Kik; **real** cases and reflecting on the **consequences** for others can help focus your conversation.



**Don't automatically assume** that they use Kik because they want to **talk to strangers**, it could be their preferred choice because many of their **friends use it** – however if they do, it is important to discuss the **risks** of talking to people they **don't** know and issues related to sharing personal information. Discuss your concerns with other professionals or parents so they are also aware.



Ask them to **delete the app**.



**Suggest another app for group chats**. One such alternative is **WhatsApp** where contacts need to be added via a phone number.

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